

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5193

SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

OSAF/INL PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

/AMEMBASSY OSLO 1057

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AFB

AFSC ANDREWS AFB

ASD WPAFB OH/CC/OI/YP

C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 0645

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, NL

SUBJ: STATE SECRETARY STEMERDINK SLIPS BACK TOWARD THE  
F-5E

REF: THE HAGUE 588

SUMMARY. IN FEBRUARY 7 CONVERSATION WITH DCM, DEFENSE  
STATE SECRETARY STEMERDINK SAID THAT FORCES LED BY HIS BOSS,  
DEFENSE MINISTER VREDELING, WERE NOW SWINGING TOWARD THE  
MIRAGE AS A MEANS OF SAVING THE "EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT  
INDUSTRY". WHILE STEMERDINK DISAVOWED ANY PERSONAL  
BELIEF IN THIS RATIONALE, HE FEARED THAT IT MIGHT  
ULTIMATELY PREVAIL. THEREFORE HE WAS WORKING ON A FALL-  
BACK POSITION WHEREBY THE NETHERLANDS WOULD BUY A QUANTITY  
OF THE NORTHROP F-5E AND UTILIZE SOME OF SAVINGS  
TO HELP THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY IN SOME UNSPECI-  
FIED FASHION. STEMERDINK DID NOT RPT NOT THINK THAT  
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THE GON WAS LIKELY TO TAKE A FINAL DECISION SOO, NOT, FOR

INSTANCE, WHEN THE DUTCH AND BELGIAN FOREIGN AND DEFENSE MINISTERS MET ON FEBRUARY 10 IN BRUSSELS IN ADVANCE OF THE FEBRUARY 17 MEETING OF THE FOUR CONSORTIUM DEFENSE MINISTERS. END SUMMARY.

1. STEMERDINK REFERRED TO A MEETING CHAIRED BY PRIME MINISTER DEN UYL THE DAY BEFORE WITH PARTICIPATION AT THE GOVERNMENT LEVEL BY VREDELING, FONMIN VAN DER STOEL, ECONOMICS MINISTER LUBBERS, FINANCE MINISTER DUISENBERG AND STEMERDINK. NOTING THAT THIS MEETING WAS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND TO CONSIDER THE REPLACEMENT FIGHTER QUESTION STEMERDINK SAID THAT NO ONE EXPRESSED ANY DOUBTS AS TO THE MILITARY SUPERIORITY OF THE F-16. AS REGARDS PRICE, THE MIRAGE WAS "TOO EXPENSIVE". THE F-16 WAS EXPENSIVE, BUT THE GON COULD AFFORD IT IF THE EXCHANGE RATE STAYED IN THE VICINITY OF 2.5 GUILDERS TO THE DOLLAR. IF, HOWEVER, THE EXCHANGE RATE MOVED UP TO 2.8 GUILDERS AN F-16 BUY WOULD CAUSE FINANCIAL PROBLEMS. DUTCH EXPERTS WERE IN FACT ANTICIPATING SUCH A RISE, STEMERDINK CONTINUED, AS THE US BEGAN TO OVERCOME ITS TWIN PROBLEMS OF RECESSION AND INFLATION. THE DCM COUNTERED THAT GIVEN THE INTERLOCKING NATURE OF THE US AND WESTERN EUROPEAN ECONOMIES, ANY SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS ON US ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WOULD PRODUCE A SIMILARLY POSITIVE EFFECT ON EUROPEAN ECONOMIES. THUS IT WOULD NOT NECESSARILY FOLLOW THAT THE DOLLAR WOULD STRENGTHEN IN THE SHORT TERM.

2. IN ADDITION TO CONCERN OVER THE F-16 EVENTUALLY COSTING MORE IN TERMS OF GUILDERS, STEMERDINK SAID, THE REAL PROBLEM WAS THAT VREDELING AND THOSE WHOSE VIEWS HE REPRESENTED WERE PUTTING A HIGH PREMIUM ON SAVING THE "EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY". STEMERDINK ACKNOWLEDGED THE SPECIOUSNESS OF THIS ARGEMENT SINCE WHAT WAS REALLY BEING TALKED ABOUT WAS THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY. HE AGREED WITH THE DCM THAT NO EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AS SUCH EXISTED TODAY.

3. IN RESPONSE TO THE DCM'S QUESTION, STEMERDINK INDICATED THAT LUBBERS' PRINCIPAL CONCERN WAS MORE WORK  
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FOR DUTCH INDUSTRY TO REDUCE PRESENT UNEMPLOYMENT. DCM STATED THAT THE F-16 PROPOSAL WOULD PROVIDE A LOT MORE JOBS TO DUTCH WORKERS THAN WOULD THE MIRAGE PROJECT. DUISENBERG, STEMERDINK CONTINUED, WAS NATURALLY FOCUSING ON THE COST OF THE REPLACEMENT FIGHTER TO THE DUTCH BUDGET. STEMERDINK GAVE NO INDICATION OF WHAT VIEWS DEN UYL MAY HAVE EXPRESSED AT THE MEETING. STEMERDINK REITERATED, HOWEVER, THAT VREDELING'S

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE MIRAGE WERE PERSUASIVE AND MIGHT EVENTUALLY PROVE IRRESISTIBLE.

4. SHIFTING HIS GROUND, STEMERDINK SAID THAT HE WAS AWARE OF THE ADVERSE EFFECT THAT A DUTCH PURCHASE OF THE MIRAGE MIGHT HAVE ON DUTCH-US RELATIONS. HE HAD, THEREFORE, DRAWN UP A "MODEL" FOR VREDELING, PROJECTING THE PURCHASE OF AN UNSPECIFIED NUMBER OF NORTHROP F-5ES TO COVER THE NETHERLANDS AIR FORCE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE FIRST FEW YEARS AFTER THE F-104S HAD BEGUN TO BE PHASED OUT. SOME OF THE CONSIDERABLE SAVINGS (AS COMPARED TO PURCHASE OF THE F-16 OR THE MIRAGE) COULD BE APPLIED TO HELP "EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY"; THE REST OF THE SAVINGS COULD BE HELD IN A RESERVE TOWARD THE PURCHASE OF F-16S IN THE 1980S. THESE F-16S WOULD BE USED TO REPLACE THE NETHERLANDS AIR FORCE'S F-5 FREEDOM FIGHTERS, WHICH WOULD THEN NEED TO BE PHASED OUT.

5. DCM REPLIED BY THANKING STEMERDINK FOR HIS FRANKNESS. DCM SAID, HOWEVER, THAT HE COULD NOT HELP BUT EXPRESS CONCERN OVER THE CONCEPT OF REPLACING THE F-104S WITH AN AIRCRAFT, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS AMERICAN-MADE AND OF PROVEN GROUND SUPPORT ABILITY, WHICH WOULD NOT MEET THE REQUIREMENTS SET BY NATO (WITH FULL DUTCH PARTICIPATION AND AGREEMENT) FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF FIGHTER AIRCRAFT. SPECIFICALLY THE F-5E LACKED THE LIMITED AIR SUPERIORITY NECESSARY FOR THE NETHERLANDS AIR FORCE TO FIGHT SUCCESSFULLY IN A HOSTILE AIR ENVIRONMENT. STEMERDINK DID NOT DENY THESE MILITARY FACTS OF LIFE BUT SAID THAT PRESSURES TO BUY A LESS EXPENSIVE PLANE SUCH AS THE F-5E WERE GREAT. HE CITED FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN PETER DANKERT (A COLLEAGUE OF CONFIDENTIAL

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STEMERDINK'S IN THE DUTCH LABOR PARTY ALTHOUGH NOT OF THE LEFT WING) AND INDICATED THAT THEY HAD BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE F-5E POSSIBILITY. DCM SUGGESTED THAT STEMERDINK DRAW UP ANOTHER "MODEL" WITH F-16 REPLACING THE F-104S IN THE FIRST PHASE, AND THE F-5E THE F-5S IN A LATER PHASE.

6. FOR CLOSERS, STEMERDINK MENTIONED THAT THE CIVIL AIR QUESTION HAD BEEN "IN THE AIR" AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING ALTHOUGH NO ONE HAD USED IT AS A MAJOR ARGUMENT AGAINST THE PURCHASE OF THE F-16. STEMERDINK SAID THAT HE DID NOT BELIEVE THERE WAS ANYTHING FURTHER THE USG NEEDED TO DO AT THIS TIME. HE INVITED THE DCM TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH HIM AND AGREED TO DCM'S SUGGESTION FOR A BRIEFING ON THE RESULTS OF THE FEBRUARY 10 MEETING OF

DUTCH AND BELGIAN DEFENSE AND FOREIGN MINISTERS.

7. COMMENT: STEMERDINK'S WILLINGNESS TO FALL BACK TO THE F-5E MARKS A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE VIEWS HE HAS EXPRESSED IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATIONS. HE MAY HAVE DECIDED THAT THE ONLY WAY TO PREVENT THE GON FROM BUYING THE MIRAGE AND AT THE SAME TIME ASSURE THAT THE GON WOULD BUY AN AMERICAN PLANE WAS TO SETTLE FOR THE F-5E. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY, AS SOME NETHERLANDS AIR FORCE OFFICERS HAVE SUGGESTED, IS THAT STEMERDINK MAY HAVE ALREADY DECIDED TO THROW HIS WEIGHT BEHIND THE F-5E IN ORDER TO SAY IN STEP WITH THE MILITANT LEFT WING OF HIS PARTY, WHICH IS VOCIFEROUSLY OPPOSED TO THE PURCHASE OF ANY HIGH PERFORMANCE AIRCRAFT IN THE F-16 CLASS. THE DIFFICULTY OF ASCERTAINING JUST WHERE STEMERDINK STANDS WAS COMPOUNDED BY HIS PUTTING ALL OF THE ONUS ON VREDELING FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE MIRAGE POSITION WITH GON. STEMERDINK CONSISTENTLY PROFESSED TO BE OPPOSED TO THE FRENCH PLANE AND DETERMINED THAT THE GON SHOULD BUY AN AMERICAN PLANE.

8. WHATEVER STEMERDINK'S MOTIVES, HIS REMARKS INDICATE THAT THE MIRAGE IS STILL A REAL POSSIBILITY FOR THE GON AND THAT SOME SENIOR GON OFFICIALS WHO WANT THE NETHERLANDS TO PURCHASE AN AMERICAN PLANE NO MATTER WHAT, MAY BE THINKING INCREAS-  
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INGLY IN TERMS OF THE F-5E.  
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## Message Attributes

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